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UNCLAS BOGOTA 005735

SIPDIS

DEPT. FOR ECA/PE/C/CU - SANDY ROUSE; WHA/PDA

E.O. 12958 N/A

TAGS: OEXC SCUL KPAO CO

SUBJECT: AMERICAN MUSIC ABROAD

REF: A) STATE 102369; B) BOGOTA 5534

¶1. In response to Ref A, Bogota enthusiastically wishes to participate in the 2005 American Music Abroad program. In particular, we hope to receive a hip-hop group. We request four programming days at any time during the week other than Sunday. We would plan to take the group to two cities with large Afro-Colombian populations.

¶2. The American Music Abroad Program in Colombia would support the MPP theme of strengthening democracy by increasing Embassy engagement with the Afro-Colombian community. Colombians of African descent constitutes one quarter of the country's population, yet some 90% percent of Afro-Colombians live in poverty and they have remained socially and economically excluded from the main currents of Colombian life. They have also suffered considerably from the country's long internal conflict, and many Afro-Colombians have been displaced from rural areas to cities, where they lack basic services. Democratic stability will require addressing the problem of economic development and social integration for Afro-Colombians.

¶3. In recognition of this challenge, the Embassy has just embarked on a major outreach initiative to increase ties with Afro-Colombians. The initiative was sparked in part by a groundbreaking U.S. Speaker program (Ref B) that brought Spelman College professor of anthropology Sheila Walker to Colombia in early May for meetings with Afro-Colombian leaders and students. Prospective outreach elements include a lunch hosted by the Ambassador, followed by a Voluntary Visitor Program, for Afro-Colombian leaders; English language scholarships for Afro-Colombian students; and the formation of an Embassy advisory committee on Afro-Colombian issues.

¶4. A program with an American hip-hop group would provide a unique opportunity to engage Afro-Colombians, particularly young people. We have, in fact, already established a connection between Afro-Colombian youth and hip-hop. Two current U.S. Fulbright graduate students are conducting research on the impact of American hip-hop on Afro-Colombian music and culture. Through their work, we know that music influenced by hip-hop has become an important source of political expression among young Afro-Colombians. We also know that live performances and workshops with an American hip-hop group would find a large and enthusiastic audience in Colombia. We also believe that such a program would result in a continuing dialogue between Afro-Colombians and the Embassy, and indeed between Afro-Colombians and their fellow citizens, about diversity, social inclusiveness, and democracy.

¶5. While security is a concern in many areas of Colombia, we do not believe security would inhibit interaction between a hip-hop group and the public in cities planned for this program. Wood